DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 371 272 CG 025 500

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TITLE Minority and Non-Minority Undergraduate Psychology Majors' Familiarity with School Psychology and Factors in Their Selection of Graduate Schools.
PUB DATE Mar 94
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Association of School Psychologists (26th, Seattle, WA, March 4-5, 1994).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Career Choice; Cultural Differences; *Educational Psychology; Ethnic Groups; *Graduate Study; Higher Education; *Majors (Students); Minority Groups; Psychologists; *Psychology; Racial Differences; School Counseling; *School Counselors; *School Psychologists; Student Interests; Undergraduate Students

ABSTRACT

The inadequate number of credentialed school psychologists in schools across the United States has concerned educational professionals for several years. One way that this problem was addressed was to mail information/recruitment posters to undergraduate psychology majors. Organizers mailed posters initially to psychology departments found in a list of Historically and Predominantly Black Colleges and Universities (HPBCU's), and then sent them to a wider audience. A sample of psychology majors who returned recruitment poster postcards served as the subjects in this study to determine the familiarity of undergraduate psychology majors with the field of school psychology. Researchers developed two forms of surveys: one for students from the HPBCU's and one for students from other institutions. The results reveal factors students consider when selecting a graduate school. Perhaps the most significant finding is that the majority of the undergraduate students, and almost two-thirds of African American and Hispanic students, report not having enough information about school psychology as a potential career choice. With regard to recruitment efforts, training programs should attend to the factors considered important by members of different ethnic groups, such as special financial support. Seven tables give detailed data on participant responses. (RJM)

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Minority and Non-Minority Undergraduate Psychology Majors' Familiarity with School Psychology and Factors in Their Selection of Graduate Schools

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Paper presented at the annual meeting of the National Association of School Psychologists, Seattle, Washington, March, 1994.

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The availability of adequate numbers of credentialed school psychologists to fulfill the demand for services in schools across the United States has been a matter of concern for several years. In June of 1987, a special meeting of the National Association of State Consultants for School Psychological Services (NASCSPS) was held for the specific purpose of addressing a perceived shortage of school psychologists. A study completed by the group revealed that although a shortage existed, it tended to be confined to specific areas of the country (NASCSPS, 1987). A study by Fagan and Kuehn (1987) also reported a shortage of school psychologists in a number of states.

A study by Connolly and Reschly (1990) analyzed the numbers of school psychologist positions anticipated in each state for the 1989-90 school year, factored in an estimated attrition rate of 5% for the field, and compared those numbers with the number of new school psychologists entering the field as estimated by school psychology training programs. Their results indicated a shortage of school psychologists, as well. As in the NASCSPS study, the shortages tended to be confined to specific regions of the country (e.g., the southeast). Most recently, the 15th Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of IDEA, 1993 reported that there is an estimated shortage of 1,297 school psychologists across the United States (Office of Special Education Programs, 1993).

Continued shortages of school psychological services personnel could have serious implications for the field, as well as for the delivery of services to students and their families (Fagan, 1988; Curtis & Zins, 1989). Because of continuing concern regarding this issue, the recruitment and retention of high quality practitioners and trainers into school psychology has been officially established as one of the top priorities of the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP).

BACKGROUND

Recruitment Poster Project

One of the efforts within NASP that was intended to address this priority involved the development and dissemination of an information/recruitment poster that targeted undergraduate psychology majors as potential school psychologists. In an earlier study by Graden (1987), members of Psi Chi, the undergraduate honorary for psychology majors, were found to have little familiarity with school psychology. The poster project was initiated through the Accreditation, Credentialing, and Training (ACT) Committee and the Public Information/Public Relations (PI/PR) Committee. The poster, School Psychology...a very special helping profession, includes photographs of school psychologists working with children, basic information about the

field, and brief statements about the rewards of being a school psychologist. The poster also includes preaddressed, postage-paid postcards that can be returned to NASP Headquarters requesting more information about school psychology. In response, individuals receive a letter from the President of NASP, the brochures What is a School Psychologist and Becoming a School Psychologist: Selecting a School Psychology Training Program, and a list of nationally approved training programs (i.e., NASP approved and/or APA accredited).

In November, 1991, the poster was mailed to 500 undergraduate psychology departments. The list of departments was compiled by first reviewing a list of Historically and Predominantly Black Colleges and Universities (HPBCU's) and identifying the 47 four-year institutions that offered psychology majors. Next the United States was divided into seven geographical regions. Using Peterson's Guide to Four-Year Colleges (1993), institutions offering psychology majors, beginning with those ranked as most competitive, were listed according to their location within one of the seven regions. After 400 institutions had been listed (including the 47 HPBCU's), another 100 institutions were added to the list based on their location in those regions identified by Connolly and Reschly (1991) as experiencing the greatest shortages of school psychologists.

Between November, 1991 and October, 1992, 1624 of the postcards were received in the NASP office. In October, 1992, the dissemination list was expanded and the poster was mailed to 1000 institutions. An additional 3307 individuals returned postcards between October, 1992 and May, 1993. In total, almost 5000 undergraduates requested information about the field of school psychology in the 18 months the project had been underway.

METHOD

The present study was designed to investigate the familiarity of undergraduate psychology majors who returned recruitment postcards with the field of school psychology, the avenues through which they had acquired information about the field, and factors that influence their selection of graduate schools. The similarities and differences between minority and non-minority students with regard to each of these areas of inquiry represented a special topic for examination.

Subjects

Undergraduate psychology majors who returned recruitment poster postcards to NASP between October 15, 1992 and May 7, 1993 served as the subjects in this study. First, from the list of 3307 students returning postcards during that timeframe, 205 students who were enrolled in one of the 47 HPBCU's were identified. Then, an equal number of students from the other

institutions receiving posters were identified. As a result, a total of 410 undergraduate psychology majors served as the subjects in this study.

Instruments

Two forms of a survey were developed, one for students from the HPBCU's and one for students from the other institutions. The two forms were identical, with the exception of two items that were included on the HPBCU form. One item on the HPBCU form asked, "Is attention to cultural diversity of special importance to you in selecting a graduate school?" The second item asked respondents who answered in the affirmative to the first item to rank order the top five factors they considered to be most important in making their selection. The list included 12 possible factors such as "special financial support for minority students" and "number of minority faculty in the program."

Both forms of the survey were identical in all other respects. Respondents were asked for basic demographic information such as age, gender, undergraduate class (e.g., freshman), undergraduate institution, and ethnicity. In addition, they were asked to answer questions relating to preferred area of psychology in which to pursue graduate study, in what ways they had acquired information regarding graduate study in psychology, as well as specifically in school psychology, both institutional and program characteristics that were important in selecting a graduate school, how they had acquired information about school psychology as a field, what services they believe school psychologists typically provide, and what services they would most like to provide as a professional psychologist.

Procedure

The survey appropriate to each group of students was mailed, along with a cover letter explaining the study and a preaddressed, postage-paid envelope on May 26, 1993. The students were asked to return the completed survey by July 1, 1993. As an incentive, they also were informed that five students returning completed forms would be randomly selected to receive a free copy of a NASP publication. To be included in the drawing, they were asked to identify the publication they would like to receive, along with their name and address, and to return that form with the completed survey.

To facilitate follow up with nonrespondents, each student was given a code number which was written on the outside of the return envelope. A second request for participation was mailed to all nonrespondents on July 23, 1993 with a requested return date of August 20, 1993.

RESULTS

The first mailing resulted in the return of 108 completed surveys, for an initial return rate of 26.3%. The second mailing generated an additional 70 completed surveys. Therefore, a total of 178 completed surveys were returned, for a final return rate of 43.4%. The return rate was 35.6% for students in the HPBCU's and 51.2% for those in other institutions. Respondents are reported according to ethnicity and gender in Table 1 and according to year of undergraduate study in Table 2.

TABLE 1
Ethnicity and Gender of Respondents

Ethnicity	Male		Female		Overall	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
African American	13	7.3	55	30.9	68	38.2
Asian	1	.6	3	1.7	4	2.2
Caucasian	11	6.2	79	44.4	90	50.6
Hispanic	3	1.7	8	4.5	11	6.2
N/R	1	.6	4	2.2	5	2.8
Total[a]	29	16.3	149	83.7	178	100.0

[a]All rows and columns may not total due to rounding.

TABLE 2
Respondents by Year of Study

Year	N	%
Freshman	9	5.1
Sophomore	18	10.1
Junior	53	29.8
Senior	82	46.1
N/R	16	9.0
Total[a]	178	100.0

[a]All rows and columns may not total due to rounding.

Of those students answering the question, 8.4% already had applied to graduate school and 84.3% were interested in graduate school. Only 5.1% reported that they were not planning on pursuing graduate studies. There was no difference between African American and Caucasian students with regard to percentages interested in graduate study in psychology, 85.3% and 85.6%, respectively. Respondents also were asked to rank order by preference all areas of psychology in which they were considering graduate training. The percentages ranking each area as their first choice are reported by ethnicity in Table 3.

TABLE 3
Areas of Psychology as First Choice
for Graduate Study by Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Clin N(%)[a]	Coun N(%)	Exp N(%)	Sch N(%)	I/O N(%)
African Am.	21(30.9)	20(29.4)	1(1.5)	17(25.0)	7(10.3)
Asian	0	2(50.0)	0	1(25.0)	0
Caucasian	18(20.0)	20(22.2)	2(2.2)	42(46.7)	5(5.6)
Hispanic	1(09.1)	3(27.3)	1(9.1)	4(36.4)	1(9.1)
N/R	2(40.0)	1(20.0)	0	2(40.0)	0
Choice Overall[b]	42(23.6)	46(25.8)	4(2.2)	66(37.1)	13(7.3)

[a]Percent within ethnic group choosing each area.
[b]Percent of all respondents to item choosing area.

As noted above, Graden (1987) reported finding that relatively few members of Psi Chi were familiar with school psychology. A fundamental reason for initiating the poster project was to address this specific problem. To determine the extent to which this particular group of students was familiar with school psychology, respondents were asked, "Do you think you have enough information about school psychology as a potential career choice?" 59.6% reported that they do not have enough information about the field, including 56.1% of the students for whom school psychology is their first choice for graduate study. The percentages are even higher for members of ethnic minority groups, 63.2% of the African American students and 63.6% of the Hispanic students.

Although it would appear that undergraduate students still

lack information about school psychology, what information they have acquired has come from a variety of sources. More than three-fourths of the students (77.5) acquired information through the materials forwarded by NASP and a majority (50.6%) through the recruitment poster itself. Contact with professionals other than a school psychologist (e.g., other psychologist, teacher) served as a source of information for almost one-half (48.9%) of the respondents. No other single source approached these three in contributing to these students familiarity with the field, with the next highest (contact with a school psychologist) being identified by 28.7%. Sources of information about school psychology are reported in Table 4.

TABLE 4
Sources of Information about School Psychology by Ethnicity

	Ethnicity				
Source	Afr. Am. (%)	Asian (%)	Cauc. (%)	Hisp. (%)	Total (%)
NASP	75.0	100.	76.7	81.8	77.5
APA	19.1	50.0	18.9	9.1	19.7
school psychologist	20.6	25.0	32.2	36.4	28.7
other professional	45.6	75.0	46.7	72.7	48.9
undergrad. advisor	22.1	25.0	26.7	18.2	24.2
undergrad. faculty	23.5	0.0	18.9	9.1	19.7
career/placement	16.2	50.0	16.7	27.3	17.4
textbook	14.7	0.0	7.8	27.3	11.2
course	17.6	25.0	21.1	9.1	19.7
program specific information	17.6	75.0	15.6	18.2	17.4
directory of graduate programs	4.4	0.0	11.1	18.2	8.4
speaker	7.4	25.0	10.0	9.1	9.6
poster	55.9	25.0	50.0	27.3	50.6

The factors that influence a student in deciding which graduate school to attend are important considerations for training programs in formulating their recruitment plans. The undergraduate students who participated in this study were asked to rank order the three most important university characteristics and the five most important program characteristics in influencing their selection of graduate schools. Their responses to these two questions are summarized in Tables 5 and 6, respectively.

TABLE 5
University Characteristics Ranked Among
Three Most Important in Selecting a Graduate School

	Ethnicity				
Characteristics	Afr. Am. (%)	Asian (%)	Cauc. (%)	Hisp. (%)	Total (%)
Setting	47.1	100.	50.0	36.4	50.0
Proximity to Undergrad. Inst.	2.9	0.0	9.9	9.1	6.7
Proximity to Home	29.4	0.0	53.4	54.6	42.2
Size	35.4	0.0	39.9	27.3	37.1
Prestige	58.8	50.0	56.7	72.8	57.3
Quality of Life	41.1	75.0	63.4	18.2	52.2
Culturally Diverse Faculty	42.7	25.0	11.1	45.5	25.9
Culturally Diverse Student Body	42.7	50.0	11.1	36.4	26.4

Given the very limited representation of members of ethnic minority groups in the field of school psychology, factors that minority students consider important in selecting graduate schools represent essential knowledge that training programs should have in formulating their recruitment and retention plans for minority students. Of the African American students enrolled in the HPBCU's who completed survey, 82.8 reported that attention to cultural diversity was of special importance in their selection of a graduate school; 17.2% said that it was not. The responses of minority students from the HPBCU's to the item regarding such factors are reported in Table 7.

TABLE 6
Program Characteristics Ranked Among Five Most Important in Selecting a Graduate School

Characteristics	Ethnicity				
	Afr. Am. (%)	Asian (%)	Cauc. (%)	Hisp. (%)	Total (%)
Length of Program	46.6	25.0	43.3	18.2	42.7
Degree Offered	61.8	25.0	65.6	54.6	61.8
Content of Program	44.1	0.0	50.0	36.4	48.3
Practical Exp's	42.6	50.0	56.7	54.5	51.1
Prestige of Program	25.0	50.0	18.9	27.3	21.9
Training Philosophy	13.2	0.0	25.6	9.1	20.2
Student-Faculty Relationships	36.8	25.0	37.8	63.6	39.9
Prestige of Faculty	4.4	0.0	5.6	9.1	5.1
Culturally Diverse Program Faculty	16.2	25.0	4.4	36.4	11.8
Same-Gender Role Models in Faculty	4.4	0.0	3.3	0.0	3.4
Faculty Research	13.2	0.0	13.3	9.1	12.4
Quality of Students	8.8	25.0	3.3	0.0	5.6
Culturally Diverse Student Body	8.8	0.0	0.0	18.2	5.1
Accreditation/ Approval	41.2	75.0	56.7	36.4	48.9
Financial Assistance	72.1	75.0	71.1	63.6	70.8
Probability of Acceptance	44.1	25.0	37.8	73.6	41.0

TABLE 7
Factors Relating to Cultural Diversity That Influence the Selection of Graduate Schools by African American Undergraduate Psychology Majors

Factor	Ranked First		Ranked in Top Five	
	N	%	N	%
Financial Support for Minority Students	26	40.6	45	70.3
Admissions Criteria for Minority Students	3	4.7	15	23.4
Special Recruitment of Minority Students	5	7.8	19	30.7
Number of Minority Students in Program	4	6.3	26	40.6
Number of Minority Students in University	1	1.6	20	31.2
Number of Minority Faculty in Program	2	3.1	26	40.6
Number of Minority Faculty in University	0	0.0	12	18.7
Promotion of Cultural Diversity in Mission of Program	6	9.4	20	31.2
Attention to Cultural Diversity in Curriculum	6	9.4	24	37.5
Mentoring/Retention	6	9.4	17	26.6
Support Groups/Org's for Minority Students	2	3.1	25	39.1
Personal contact with Minority Faculty/Students During Admissions Process	2	3.1	23	35.9

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Although there are some differences among ethnic groups, the results of this study reflect more interest overall among the respondents in school psychology than in any other specialty in psychology (Table 3). Of course, it cannot be overlooked that the subject were undergraduate psychology majors who had returned postcards requesting information about the field, and thereby potentially reflecting a higher level of interest than might be found among psychology majors at large.

However, aside from the issue of specialty interest, the results offer insights into many other issues regarding the familiarity of these undergraduate with school psychology and into the factors they consider in selecting graduate schools. Perhaps the most significant finding is that the majority of the undergraduate students, and almost two-thirds of African American and Hispanic students report not having enough information about school psychology as a potential career choice. This is a problem that persists and must be addressed if the shortage of personnel is to be remedied.

As would be expected from this particular sample, NASP represents their primary source of information about the field (Table 4). On the other hand, it may noteworthy that relatively few of them have acquired such information from any other single source, with the exception of their contacts with professionals other than school psychologists. This information seems to suggest that there are other mechanisms that should be targeted in an effort to provide psychology majors with more information about school psychology. For example, undergraduate faculty and advisors should be knowledgeable about this field and should provide their students with related information. Yet, only 24.2% of the students report receiving such information from their advisors and only 19.7% from other undergraduate faculty.

With regard to recruitment efforts, training programs should carefully attend to differences among the members of different ethnic groups with regard to factors they consider important in selecting graduate schools. Such factors could be important not only in the development of recruiting materials, but in the development of recruitment plans. For example, proximity to home was identified as important by 54.6% of the Hispanic students and 53.4% of the Caucasian students, but by only 29.4% of the African American students. Such information might be helpful in deciding upon which undergraduate institutions to target for recruitment.

Special attention should be given to those factors identified by African American students as being important considerations in selecting a graduate school. Special financial support for minority students is clearly the most important issue for these students. No other factor relating to cultural diversity was ranked among the top five by more than 40.6%

(number of minority students in the program and number of minority faculty in the program). Nevertheless, factors such as these cannot be overlooked. These findings reinforce the importance of recruiting minority faculty and minority students in order to recruit other minority students.

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